

WALTHAM SCHOOL COMMITTEE
Waltham, Massachusetts
REGULAR MEETING

MINUTES

JANUARY 7, 2026

The regular meeting of the Waltham School Committee convened at 5:08pm. Present were Ms. Wong-Bigelow, Ms. DeJoannis, Mrs. Coleman, Mr. Zanghi, and Mayor McCarthy. Mr. Tarallo and Ms. Donnelly were not present. Mayor McCarthy presided.

RECESS

VOTED: On motion of Mrs. Coleman, seconded by Ms. DeJoannis, to move to Executive Session at 5:09pm to conduct strategy sessions with respect to collective bargaining with the WEA and / or to conduct negotiations with the WEA; to conduct strategy sessions with respect to collective bargaining with the WSSA and / or to conduct negotiations with the WSSA; to conduct strategy sessions with respect to collective bargaining with the WSAA and / or to conduct negotiations with the WSAA; to conduct strategy sessions with respect to collective bargaining with the Waltham School MIS Technicians and / or to conduct negotiations with the Waltham School MIS Technicians; to conduct strategy sessions with respect to collective bargaining with the Waltham School Department Food Service Workers and / or conduct negotiations with the Waltham School Department Food Service Workers; to conduct strategy sessions with respect to collective bargaining with the Waltham School Building Trades and / or to conduct negotiations with the Waltham School Building Trades, and to conduct collective bargaining sessions to include a grievance hearing under Purpose 2 and to discuss strategy with respect to litigation under Purpose 3 if an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the litigating position of the public body and the chair so declares - Waltham School Administrators Association and Waltham School Committee, Grievance Dated November 4, 2025, WHS TASC Classroom Teacher Duties, to include Attorney Jonathan Atwater, HR Administrator Kate Peretz, and Superintendent Dr. Marisa Mendonsa, and to return to the regular meeting at 7:00 pm. All in favor.

RECONVENE

The School Committee reconvened at 7:11pm. Present were Mr. Tarallo, Mr. Zanghi, Mrs. Coleman, Ms. DeJoannis, Ms. Wong-Bigelow, and Mayor McCarthy. Ms. Donnelly was not present. Mayor McCarthy presided.

ORGANIZATIONAL MEETING

Mayor McCarthy called the Organizational Meeting of the Waltham School Committee to order at 7:12pm and opened the meeting for nominations for Waltham School Committee Clerk for 2026.

VOTED: On motion of Mrs. Coleman, seconded by Mr. Tarallo, to nominate Dr. Mendonsa as Clerk of the Waltham School Committee for 2026. All in favor.

VOTED: On motion of Mr. Tarallo, seconded by Mr. Zanghi, to nominate Mrs. Coleman as Vice Chair of the Waltham School Committee for 2026. All in favor.

VOTED: On motion of Mr. Tarallo, seconded by Mrs. Coleman, to approve the 2026 School Committee Policy Manual. All in favor.

Mayor McCarthy declared the Organizational Meeting closed at 7:13pm and the Regular Meeting resumed.

RECONVENE

The Regular Meeting of the School Committee resumed at 7:13pm with all members, except Ms. Donnelly, still present.

Mr. Tarallo led the Committee in the Pledge of Allegiance.

MOMENT OF SILENCE

The Committee stood for a moment of silence to remember Elaine Mitchell who taught at Northeast and Plympton Elementary Schools for thirty-five years.

PUBLIC INPUT

WPS staff member and Waltham resident Krissy Scheufele addressed the Committee to inquire about when the proposals for the new high school schedule will be presented to the Committee for consideration. She asked if the proposed models will be reviewed by the Committee and staff in advance, and whether they include a reduction in staff and will eliminate courses and also, Hawk Block. If a solid plan is not being proposed, she urged the members to consider waiting a year to implement.

Ms. Scheufele shifted her focus to the lack of contract for the teachers as well as the secretaries within the WSSA (of which she is a member). She indicated the WSSA's last contract expired on June 30, 2025 and secretaries, who are the backbone of the district, are being under-valued and disrespected. She does not believe the yearly COLA is sufficient to offset inflation costs and also stated a COLA is not a salary increase based on merit. It was noted that longevity is no longer recognized and newer employees are receiving a salary nearly comparable to those who have dedicated decades to the district.

**STUDENT COUNCIL
STUDENT INPUT**

Waltham High School student Eva Ghazarian shared that members of the Show Choir and Music Unlimited sang at the city's inauguration event held last Sunday. Both varsity basketball teams fell to tough Acton-Boxboro teams earlier this week and, at the end of January, Dance Theatre will have multiple performances.

**SCHOOL
COUNCIL/PTO/
SEPAC/BELPAC
INPUT**

There was no one present from these groups who requested to speak with the Committee.

CONSENT AGENDA

Superintendent Dr. Mendonsa presented the following Consent Agenda items:

- Minutes from the Regular Meeting held on December 17, 2025;

Retirement:

- Nadene Stein, Central Office, Assistant Superintendent for Pupil Services - effective 12/31/2025

Dr. Mendonsa expressed her appreciation for four generous donations to Waltham Public Schools:

- A donation of six 3D printers from Brandeis University's Engineering and Business Division to McDevitt Middle School's CTE Tech Engineering class;
- An anonymous donation in the amount of \$1,000. to Waltham High School's Class of 2026 to help support senior activities;
- A \$3,200. donation from Kelly L. Fitzpatrick to Waltham High's Class of 2026 to also help support senior class activities; and
- A donation in the amount of \$30,000 to Waltham High School from the Retired Municipal Employees of Waltham, in memory of Charles Williams, to establish an annual \$2,000. scholarship to a graduating senior who has a family member who is or was a City of Waltham municipal employee.

VOTED: On motion of Mrs. Coleman, seconded by Mr. Tarallo, to approve the Consent Agenda. All in favor.

COMMUNICATIONS

Nothing new in the area of Communications was shared at the meeting.

SUPERINTENDENT'S UPDATE

a) Miscellaneous Personnel

New Hires:

- Aleigha Rivera, Substitute Teacher, District-Wide, effective - 12/17/2025;
- Jenna Carlson, Substitute Teacher, District-Wide, effective - 12/17/2025;
- Mary Leonelli, Substitute Teacher, District-Wide, effective - 12/17/2025;
- David Richman, Grade 5 Math Teacher, Stanley Elementary School - effective 01/30/2026;
- Mackenzie Mercier, Substitute Teacher, District-Wide, effective - 12/15/2025;
- Lisa Kingsley, Interim Assistant Superintendent of Special Education and Student Services, Central Office, effective - 01/05/2026;
- Keegan Gildea, Substitute Teacher, District-Wide, effective - 01/05/2026;
- Asthon Graham, Substitute Teacher, District-Wide, effective - 01/05/2026;
- Matthew Ventura, Substitute Teacher, District-Wide, effective - 12/22/2025;
- Amanda Cormier, Paraprofessional, Plympton Elementary School, effective - 01/05/2026;
- Jennifer Warren, Special Education Paraprofessional, Kennedy Middle School, effective - 01/05/2026;
- Ari Herzog, English Teacher - LTS, Waltham High School, effective - LTS 01/26/2026 - 05/01/2026;
- Chcresnel Horace, Building Maintenance Worker, Stanley Elementary School, effective - 12/29/2025;
- Guy M. Nazaire, Building Maintenance Worker, Waltham High School, effective - 12/29/2025;
- Aidan Connors, Building Substitute, Stanley Elementary School, effective - 01/05/2026;
- Kelly Fong, Paraprofessional Bridge Program, Plympton Elementary School, effective - 01/05/2026

Transfers and Promotions:

- Jason Desrosiers, House Office Secretary, Waltham High School - effective 12/15/2025;
- Donnelle James, Paraprofessional, Kennedy Middle School - effective 12/08/2025;

- Narcy Ortega, Paraprofessional, Northeast Elementary School - effective 12/01/2025;
- Carli Kusiolek, Evaluation Team Leader, Whittemore Elementary School - effective 1/5/2026;
- Alexa Davis, Evaluation Team Leader, Kennedy Middle School - effective 1/5/2026;
- Mary-Jo Delorey, Special Education Teacher, Waltham High School effective - 1/25/2026 - 6/30/2026;
- Sarah Wysocki-Donovan, Special Education Teacher, Waltham High School - effective 01/05/2026 - 6/30/2026;
- Kara Engels, Special Education Teacher, Waltham High School - effective 01/05/2026 - 6/30/2026;
- Kyra Laffey, LTS Grade 7 Science, Kennedy Middle School - effective 01/05/2026 - 4/27/2026;
- Phillip Ranucci, Building Maintenance Worker, Waltham High School - effective 10/06/2025 - 6/30/2026;
- Jeff Dumerjean, Acting Senior Custodian, Whittemore Elementary School - effective 12/08/2025 - 6/30/2026;
- Isabel Powell, LTS Grade 2, Stanley Elementary School - effective 01/20/2026 - end of March (approx.)

b) Information

The superintendent introduced Dr. Lisa Kingsley as the new Interim Assistant Superintendent of Special Education and Student Services (following Dr. Nadene Stein's retirement) and confirmed she will be with the district for the remainder of the school year.

Dr. Mendonsa shared that, prior to the holiday break, the Hawks for the Holidays program run by Waltham High School was again, very successful. Through a lot of hard work and generosity, the program helped provide holiday gifts to over 325 Waltham children in our community.

c) Monthly
District
Enrollment

The district's current enrollment stands at 5,663 students with the slow uptick occurring at the elementary level.

**CURRICULUM AND
INSTRUCTION**

Within this category, nothing new was presented to the Committee.

**UNFINISHED
BUSINESS**a) MSBA -
Waltham High
School Project

The Mayor announced another meeting about the project will be taking place later in January.

b) Anti-Racism,
Diversity,
Equity and
Inclusion

The most recent meeting of the district's equity team took place on Monday afternoon and the team is working on building out actionable items for years one, two and three of the plan. Small working groups have been tackling various items and they will reconvene as a larger group to collaborate at the next meeting.

- c) Dual
Language
School Model
and
Reutilization of
617 Lexington
Street

The next meeting of the 617 Committee will take place next Monday.

- d) Emotional
Support Dogs
Policy
(Second
Reading)

The Emotional Support Dogs Policy returned for the second reading again.

VOTED: On motion of Mr. Tarallo, seconded by Mrs. Coleman, to approve the Second Reading of the Emotional Support Dogs policy. Roll call: Mr. Zanghi - yes; Mr. Tarallo - yes; Mrs. Coleman - yes; Ms. DeJoannis - abstain, and Ms. Wong-Bigelow - abstain. **The motion did not pass.*

A short conversation between Mr. Zanghi and Mayor McCarthy took place prior to the vote. Mr. Zanghi requested a friendly amendment to the motion but it was denied by Mr. Tarallo. Following the vote, Mr. Zanghi made a motion to grandfather "Nala" into the proposed policy. There were no seconds to this motion and Mr. Zanghi subsequently withdrew it.

Ms. DeJoannis advised she was in attendance (in the audience) at the prior meetings where the proposed policy was discussed and it was noted that feedback should be solicited. Mayor McCarthy indicated that had not yet happened due to the school vacation.

VOTED: On motion of Mrs. Coleman, seconded by Mr. Zanghi, to table the Second Reading of the Emotional Support Dogs policy. Roll call: Mr. Zanghi - yes; Mr. Tarallo - no; Mrs. Coleman - yes; Ms. DeJoannis - abstain, and Ms. Wong-Bigelow - abstain. **The motion did not pass.*

Mayor McCarthy announced the item was to be tabled by default.

Mr. Tarallo made a motion to file the Emotional Support Dogs policy and this was seconded for discussion by Mrs. Coleman. Mayor McCarthy explained the difference between tabling a matter and filing a matter to the new members. Mrs. Coleman then withdrew her second to the motion and there were no additional seconds. The item stands as tabled.

- e) Waltham High
School's Career
and Technical
Education
(CTE)
Department

Dr. Mendonsa shared that the next CTE Family Forum will be held Wednesday, January 14th at 5:30pm and will explore the Graphic Design and Fashion Design programs. The link to the virtual forum is available in the district newsletter that was sent out last week.

f) School
Committee
Union
Representatives

The Mayor indicated that with the departure of Mrs. AlJammal and Mr. Frassica, there are now some unions that need a School Committee representative for contract negotiations. She reviewed the unions and confirmed the representatives for the WEA are Mr. Tarallo and Mrs. Coleman.

There is a vacant spot for each of the MIS, Food Service and Building Trades unions. Mr. Zanghi volunteered to be the School Committee representative for the three unions.

VOTED: On motion of Mr. Tarallo, seconded by Mrs. Coleman, to approve Mr. Zanghi as the School Committee representative for the MIS, Food Service and Building Trades unions. All in favor.

The WSAA union currently has Mrs. Coleman as a representative but needs an additional person. Ms. DeJoannis volunteered.

VOTED: On motion of Mr. Tarallo, seconded by Mrs. Coleman, to approve Ms. DeJoannis as the additional School Committee representative for the WSAA union. All in favor.

The WSSA union currently has Mr. Zanghi as a representative but needs an additional person. Ms. Wong-Bigelow volunteered.

VOTED: On motion of Mrs. Coleman, seconded by Mr. Tarallo, to approve Ms. Wong-Bigelow as the additional School Committee representative for the WSSA union. All in favor.

NEW BUSINESS

There were no matters in New Business to be discussed.

FISCAL MATTERS

a) Bills on
Warrant

VOTED: On motion of Mr. Tarallo, seconded by Mrs. Coleman, to pay the bills on warrant. All in favor.

**AGENDA ITEMS
FOR FUTURE
MEETINGS**

Ms. DeJoannis indicated she would like to propose a town hall or public hearing be held to obtain feedback from the community about the proposed emotional support dogs policy. A short discussion followed.

VOTED: On motion of Ms. DeJoannis, seconded by Ms. Wong-Bigelow, to hold a Public Hearing for anyone within the Waltham Public Schools community to share feedback about the proposed Emotional Support Dogs policy. All in favor.

Prior to the vote on the motion, Mr. Tarallo addressed Ms. DeJoannis and noted there have been three readings of the proposed policy and three opportunities for members of the community to speak to the Committee. He said it is time to move on.

Dr. Mendonsa inquired about a possible date for the public hearing and explained that notice of the hearing needs to be posted at least seven days prior. Mayor McCarthy stated she thinks it would be best to have the hearing by the end of the month. The next School Committee meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, January 21st, 2026.

VOTED: On motion of Mrs. Coleman, seconded by Mr. Tarallo, to hold a Public Hearing about the proposed Emotional Support Dogs policy on Wednesday, January 21, 2026 at 7pm. All in favor.

ADJOURNMENT

VOTED: On motion of Mrs. Coleman, seconded by Mr. Tarallo, to adjourn the Regular Meeting at 7:46pm. All in favor.

Dr. Marisa Mendonsa
Clerk